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DEADWOOD DICK'S DUTCH RARD



OR,
**Rooting Out the Rascals
Of Skeleton Gorge.**

BY ED. L. WHEELER.
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LAYING A DEATH WAGER.

SKELETON GORGE.

In more ways than one the name was suggestive.

It looked like the bare framework of a world, grim, gaunt, uncanny,

OVER WENT THE YOUNG MAN, DRAGGING DEADWOOD DICK WITH HIM.

Then there was the skeleton in fact, about midway along the gorge, in one of its deepest and darkest parts, a silent witness of some dark crime, perhaps.

Aye, even perchance the victim of the crime.

Be that as it might, there was the skeleton, high up on the right-hand side of the gorge—going in the direction of Bald Eagle, between two gigantic boulders.

There it stood, partly supported by the mentioned boulders and partly held in place by some vines and scrubs that found scant subsistence in that barren place. And there it grinned down upon all who passed by that way, a startling spectacle in that solitude.

This had given the gorge its name.

And then it was suggestive in another way. Skeleton Gorge was not only one of the roughest canyons in the whole West, but it was a stronghold for outlaws, and the skeleton suggested the probable fate of a stranger who had the temerity to venture within its environs.

Honest men had come to shun the region as they would shun a pestilence.

Two clans there had their rendezvous—one at the camp of Hard Luck and the other at a place at the other end of the gorge, the mentioned Bald Eagle.

Not that they were openly manifest in these places, but everybody knew they were there; and some of these had gained their knowledge through a bitter experience.

These clans were, in a way, rivals. They did not prey upon each other, but each was eager to be the first to pluck the feathers of any unfortunate bird that happened to come within reach.

Ostensibly, the camp of Hard Luck was a typical mining town, and the same could be said of Bald Eagle.

The mayor of Hard Luck was one Hud Miller.

If ever the world had a hard-looking denizen, this same Hud Miller was the man.

He was big, coarse, ill-favored, with but one eye, and his nose, having been broken, was considerably askew. Then, too, he was frightfully pockmarked, and his beard grew in patches.

This man-in-authority was sitting in his "office" one morning, his heels higher than his head, smoking a black pipe, and with a suspicious-looking bottle within reach of his hand, when his right-hand man came hurrying in, his face showing that something was amiss.

The mayor's feet came quickly to the floor, as he demanded:

"Hello! What's up, Gillins?"

"Buck Dalton is comin', with his bower," was the information.

Instantly the mayor of Hard Luck jerked his brace of guns from his belt.

"Is he comin' in peace?"

"Don't know. I sighted 'em, and thought I had better let you know quick."

"That was right. See to your guns."

"Oh, they are all right, you bet."

"What do ye s'pose he kin want, Ned?"

"Give et up, Hud."

"It is a good while since he was here."

"Yes; and you didn't part none too good friends on that 'casion."

"'Cause we wouldn't let him and his galoots carry off in their b'ilers the best of everything we had. If that is what they want this time, they will get left."

Two other men entered.

The first of these, while not so ill-favored as the mayor of Hard Luck, was just as villainous, if looks counted.

This was Buck Dalton, the mayor of Bald Eagle, and the fellow with him was one Mat Baldwin, popularly known as Dalton's Bower, a fitting offset to Ned Gillins.

"How do?" greeted Buck.

"So-so," answered Hud. "How is it with yourself?"

"Ditto."

"Set down."

"Yas, we will, fur we have come on biz, Hud."

"Wull, right hyer is the place whur business is done, Buck, so open up your skeem."

"What ye got in that?" and he indicated the bottle.

"Nectar. Sample et."

The caller needed no urging; he sampled liberally and passed it over to his man.

"Now," he remarked, "have ye heard the news?"

"No; what is et?"

"It is the kind of news that ordinarily I wouldn't tell ye, but in this case et is to our best interest all around."

"That's all right; what is et?"

"Mat hyer has been to Prescott, as mebbly ye have heard."

"The wonder is he didn't stay there."

"As a guest, hey? Wull, he didn't, but he picked up a big item of news, I tell ye."

"What is et? That is what I'm after."

"Deadwood Dick, is what et is."

"Deadwood Dick! What about him?"

"He is comin' hyer."

"Whew!"

"That is the sum an' substance of et, and we have got to make sure to nab him and put him out of the way."

"Wull, I should say so! But, what brings him hyer?"

"Ye see, they are goin' to try to rout out sartain outlaws that they claim infest the region hyerabouts, and they want evidence against somebody so's they will have somethin' to swear by."

"And they are sendin' Deadwood Dick to get et."

"That's it."

"Well, that means we've got to keep an eye out fer him, I would say."

"Just what et does. You see, Hud, I am givin' you a square white deal this time."

"'Cause et's fer yer own good, hey?"

"Et is fer the good of both of us, as you will admit, I reckon. We can't afford to let that devil's own deputy come here and get away again with a whole neck; and so, while I don't deny that we are goin' to try to be the ones to nab him, fer the honer of the thing, yet we must work together, if need be, so that he won't stand no show—See?"

"Yes, I see; and I'll bet you a pound of dust that we git him and you don't."

"You want to bet a pound of dust that Hard Luck gets Deadwood Dick?"

"Yes. There is your chance, now, if you want it."

"I'll take it, by mighty!"

"You'll lose if you do, sure, because, in the first place, comin' from Prescott, ef that is whar he is now, he will be most likely to strike Hard Luck first and so on to Bald Eagle by Skeleton Gorge."

"I admit that. And you think you'll nab him eh?"

"Well, it will be funny if we don't. Dare ye take me up on et?"

"That's jest what I do, bettin' you a pound against a pound that we get him and you don't. But, there is one condition that had orter be named. If he is

likely to get away, the bet must be off and we must join hands to nab him."

"That's right; that's understood. Deadwood Dick must never get out of Skeleton Gorge alive."

CHAPTER II.

A MAN AND A MULE.

Could it be true that the detective terror was coming there, and that they had foreknowledge of his coming?

If true, then Deadwood Dick, Jr., prince of rogue catchers though he was, was destined to have a hot hustle, with the chances all against him.

The mayors of the rival towns shook hands over their wager, and then he of Hard Luck was generous enough to pass around his bottle of "syrup" once more, after which they fell to discussing matters more in detail, and were still talking when there arose an uproar in the street in front of the mayor's "office."

"What has broke loose now?" demanded Ned Gillins, making for the door.

"Somebody with a jag, mebbly."

"Or mebbly Deadwood Dick," suggested Mat Baldwin.

"Jist what I was goin' to say myself," from Buck.

"If et is, we have got the bulge on your one-horse town, that is as sure as shootin'," cried Hud Miller.

Out they tumbled, to join the crowd rapidly congregating.

At what they beheld all began to laugh.

The whole foreground was filled with a mule.

That is, the mule was making such an ado that it was, so to say, the most striking feature of the landscape.

It was bobbing up and down, front and rear, like a tubby boat in a chop sea—only a good deal more so, squealing and braying, and kicking out with its feet seemingly in every direction at once.

The mule bore the U. S. brand, and hence it was a mule of the genuine "Government" kind, famous as the most mulish mules anywhere under the sun.

Its rider was of secondary consequence.

He was a lanky individual, clad in shiny, seedy, and shabby black, with a battered black plug on his head.

His coat was made to button straight up to the chin, but the mad antics of the mule had evidently disarranged it, and there were no evidences that the man wore any shirt.

His feet were incased in one boot and one shoe, both considerably the worse for wear.

He was a sad and sorry specimen.

"Save me!" he was shouting. "For the love of heaven, somebody save me!"

While sitting astride, yet his body was half turned, and with one hand he had hold upon the mule's cropped mane and with the other a death grip upon the butt end of its tail.

"Whee-e-e-e!" squealed the mule, as if in defiance. "Hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw! Bra-a-aah!"

"Won't somebody save me?" cried the man. "Shoot it—but for goodness sakes take care not to hit me! Do anything, no matter what, so long as you stop it!"

"Why don't you let go and fall off?" some fellow called out.

"I would be kicked to death, instantly," the man responded, in jerky fashion.

"Then let go and jump out of reach," another advised.

"I cant oh! I cant. I am getting seasick! Won't somebody rush in and grab the infernal critter by the head?"

"No Deadwood Dick about that' galoot," observed Mayor Miller to the visiting mayor.

"Don't you swear to that, Hud," was the response. "Deadwood Dick kin change himself in more ways than a leopard has got spots."

"I'll bet et is him!" averred Mat Baldwin.

"And I'm bettin' et ain't!" said Gillins. Thus was opinion divided.

The mule kept up its antics without any show of cessation.

"I ought to have known better," the man in seedy black jerked out—or the mule jerked out of him. "The wages—the wages of sin—the wages of sin is death!"

"Ha! ye own ye're a sinner, do ye, old chap?" was called out.

"Yes—yes; I have sinned a great, a grievous sin, my friend; I—I stole the mule!"

The shout of laughter that followed was uproarious, and in the midst of it the man fell off the mule, and instantly the mule stood still with head bowed.

It was as meek and lovable a mule as the eye of man could wish to behold.

The rider lay where he had fallen, flat on his back, with his face upturned to the sky, as motionless as if he were dead.

"Come, old man, git up!" some one shouted.

"Git up!" another. "You ain't hurt; you're good fur another round."

The man did not move, but opened his eyes and rolled them in the direction of the mule.

As if aware of the look, the mule slightly turned its head and took a side-long glance at its laid-out victim.

The man moaned.

"How can I get up?" he asked. "Don't you see how the mule is watching me? If I as much as lift a finger I'll get kicked to death."

"Bosh!" cried Mayor Miller. "Git right up, man! Ther mule won't harm ye now. All it wanted was to get ye off its back. It would be a mean mule to kick a man when he's down."

"You watch and see, if you don't believe it."

The man slightly moved one arm, and instantly the mule lifted one hind hoof and gave it a twitch or two, as if to see that it was in good working order.

With a groan the man dropped his arm, and the mule put down its leg, while the crowd nearly went wild with merri-ment. It was more fun than they had had in a dog's age.

"What did I tell you?" demanded the man. "For the love of goodness, gentlemen, shoot the brute or drive it away and give me a chance to get up."

"I don't want any of that in mine," avowed Ned Gillins.

"No, nur me," agreed Baldwin.

"Won't somebody rescue me?" the stranger pleaded.

"Why don't ye rescue yerself?" from Buck Dalton.

"How am I to do it? Only tell me how, and I'll do anything."

"Why, take a start and roll over and over as fast as you can till you get out o' range."

"Do you think I could do that?"

"Of course you kin do et! A man like you needn't be afraid of a mule; you have faced worse dangers in your day."

"Only once, sir, I assure you."

"And when was that?"

"I once stole a ride on a freight train, and the car I was under was loaded with dynamite. I heard the trainmen say so

just as the train started, and I couldn't get out then, so there I had to stay. The train ran for two hours without a stop, and there I had to cling for life, yet expecting every moment to be blown to fragments."

"But you lived through it all right?"

"Yes, but it was a close call. At the first stop I got out and ran for life, and, would you believe it, I had no more than gone a safe distance when a jolt set the dynamite off, and half the train, and the station with it, was blown out of the country. That was the only time in my life that I ever had a worse experience, I assure you."

"What has that to do with the mule?" demanded Miller. "Where does the comparison come in?"

"Why, you see, I didn't know that was a car of dynamite, and I didn't know this was a Government mule; and the only difference is that I got away before the dynamite went off, while the mule went off before I got away. But, give me a little room, boys, and I'll try that rolling trick, and see if I can save my skin in that manner. But, the brute is lookin' at me; I'll bet a penny he knows what I am saying!"

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER REPORT RENDERED.

The denizens of Hard Luck were enjoying it immensely, and nearly every man in the crowd had some word of advice to offer.

They now made room for the man to make his escape if he could, but the first move on his part caused the mule to lift its hind hoof again and make ready for business.

"The gods have mercy on me!" sighed the man. "You won't shoot the brute, and this is my only hope."

"Too good a mule to shoot," commented Buck.

"Well, here goes!"

The man took a full breath, closed his eyes, and then, of a sudden, rolled quickly toward the crowd.

No sooner did he move than the mule's heels shot out, not only once, but half a dozen times in quick succession, in a twinkling fashion, but the man escaped their touch.

The crowd laughed heartily.

"Heaven be praised!" cried the stranger.

The mule stood as demure and passive as if nothing had happened.

"Good for you, stranger!" congratulated Dalton. "You done that as slick as wax."

"Kind fortune favored me, or I would now be drawing my last gasp," spoke the stranger, most seriously. "I feel aggrieved that you did not shoot the infernal—"

"Too good a mule, I told you," interrupted Buck.

"That's so," acquiesced Miller.

"Well, will you buy the brute—"

"Buy a stolen mule!" exclaimed the mayor of Hard Luck. "Well, I reckon not, but we'll take it and hold it for the owner."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Ned Gillins. "That's the idee, mayor."

"I'll do better than that," spoke up the visiting mayor. "I'll give you five dollars for the critter, stranger, and take et home with me."

"Done!" cried the seedy customer. "Hand out the fiver."

"No you don't, Buck Dalton," opposed the mayor of Hard Luck. "What comes to your trap is yours, but what comes

to mine stays right hyer. Boys, some of you take keer of the mule."

"But, you don't mean to rob me!" cried the newcomer.

"Second thief best owner," reminded Miller.

The crowd laughed, and Dalton and his man were chagrined.

"Hold on, Hud Miller!" Dalton called out, as the mayor of Hard Luck turned in the direction of the hotel. "We have got somethin' more serious 'n mule business to settle hyer with this chap."

"What is that?"

The mayor of Hard Luck stopped and turned back.

"You know what I hinted to you. We want this feller to give an account of himself."

"But, I don't agree with you. I admit that the chap we want is a cute cuss, but he couldn't never make up like this and fool us."

The man in seedy black looked from one to another, wonderingly.

"Do you know Deadwood Dick?" demanded Dalton.

"Well, no," admitted Miller, "but I have heard what kind of looking fellow Deadwood Dick is, and this can't be him."

"He has a hundred disguises."

"But he couldn't make himself this old scarecrow at short notice, I'm bettin' on that. Why, he would have to fast a month to reduce his weight, and then he'd be better-lookin'."

"What is all this about, good friends?" asked the newcomer.

"It is just this," cried Dalton: "We want to know who and what you are, and all about ye."

"And you, take me to be somebody, other than I am?"

"Yes, we do just that!"

"Well, you wrong me, greatly. I am myself, patented, copyrighted, and all rights reserved."

"Then who and what are ye?" asked Mayor Miller.

"My name is Wilson Horn, and I'm a lawyer by profession. Blackstone and all his ilk are A B C to me. I have made several reputations in time past, and I am now out to make another. Kind fortune—and that mule—brought me hither, and here I think I'll stop awhile."

Before more could be said, a shout arose.

A horseman was seen coming from the direction of Bald Eagle, having just burst out of the gorge, and all eyes were turned toward him.

On he came, at a breakneck gait.

"Why, that is Bob Ginger, as I'm a sinner!" cried Mat Baldwin.

"So it is!" echoed the mayor of Bald Eagle. "What is up, that he is coming here at that pace?"

Attention being drawn away from Mr. Horn, that worthy began to slap the dust out of his clothes and arrange his toilet as best he could under the circumstances.

The horseman was at hand.

"Hello, Bob!" cried Buck Dalton. "What is the matter?"

"Matter enough; we have got Deadwood Dick cornered at Bald Eagle."

"Deadwood Dick?"

"That's what we think."

"And we thought we had him here."

"Where?"

"This chap," indicating Horn.

"That thing? Ha! ha! ha!"

"My Christian friend," said Mr. Horn, seriously, "I object to being called a thing. I am a leader among men."

"Mebby you led a lynchin' party, and

succeeded in gettin' away from 'em," from Ginger. "You don't look as if you ever led in any other fashion, 'cept mebby in the lockstep gang."

"Sirrah!"

"No matter; don't bristle up about et; you know and I don't."

The crowd enjoyed a laugh at Mr. Horn's expense, and he subsided and stepped back from the front.

Meanwhile, some of the boys had captured the mule, and were having about all they could do to control it and lead it away to a stable. It was now confiscated property.

"But, this man you think is Deadwood Dick—what about him?" inquired the mayor of Bald Eagle.

"Why, you told us to look out for strangers, you know—"

"Yes, yes; never mind that."

"Well, this one kem ridin' in, and we nipped on to him and bundled him into jail, and I set out to get you."

"What is he like?"

"He is as big as two of this skeleton you have got here, and says his name is Hans Donnerwelt. He is as Dutch as all git out!"

"And you think Deadwood Dick is a—"

"You said never mind what a newcomer looked like—"

"Yes, that's so; if I took this chap fer him, you are excused."

"They certainly can't both be Deadwood Dick," here put in Mayor Miller, "and I am betting rocks this one ain't him."

"You are right, sir," assured Mr. Horn himself. "I don't know who this Deadwood Dick may be, but I know that I am not the man."

"Well, I'll go home and see what I've got," announced Mayor Dalton of Bald Eagle. "It may be, Miller, old fellow, that Bald Eagle will come out on top in the game, after all. You bet we are goin' to try to. But, no matter about that; we must make sure of our man, no matter what comes."

"You bet. But, hello! what the mischief has broke loose hyer?"

They all looked where he indicated.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEED OF A DEMON.

A horse was tearing into the camp at a furious pace.

On its back was a rider, and that rider a woman. Her long hair was floating on the breeze, and her arms could not be seen.

She was coming from the west, and the horse was heading straight for Skeleton Gorge. As she came nearer her cries for help were heard, and the crowd prepared to stop the horse.

"Who the deuce kin et be?" demanded Miller.

"Be hanged to me ef I know," responded the mayor of Bald Eagle. "No chance to say et's Deadwood Dick this time. Hello! she's bound!"

"I believe she is, fer a fact!"

Dalton and his bower, having left their horses just outside the mayor's office, the mayor of Bald Eagle made a dash for his steed, vaulted into the saddle, and gave the animal's flanks a dig with his heels.

The crowd had made way for him, and off he went to meet the oncoming horse. As he rode he unwound a rope from the horn of his saddle and prepared to make use of it.

The horse, with its bound rider, was now near at hand, and Dalton made a cast with his rope.

On it went, with graceful, sinuous mo-

tion; the loop fell over the head of the runaway and tightened and speedily brought it to a stop.

The rider was a young woman, not more than twenty-two years of age at the most, and rather inclined to good looks than otherwise, but was coarsely clad.

Her face was now pale, her eyes wildly distended, and a look of horror and anguish was in their depths.

"Thank heaven for my rescue!" she said, fervently.

"Never mind heaven, miss, thank me," and Dalton rode up to her.

"You could never have done it without the help of Providence, sir; it was not willed that I should die, and you were chosen as the instrument—"

"We won't argy that p'int, my pretty dear. You have your opinion about that, and I have mine. I have been wanting a wife for some time, and now I have got one—"

"Oh! sir, do not speak thus; I am a wife already."

"A little thing like that don't matter; mebby it won't be much trouble to make ye a widder—"

Just then the crowd surged forward, headed by the mayor of Hard Luck.

"That was well done, by Harry!" exclaimed Miller.

"Wull, yes, I flatter myself et was purty well done," agreed Dalton.

"And I'll throw off yer rope, fer the hoss is still enough now and is tremblin' all over."

"Don't you tetch that 'ar rope, Hud Miller," warned Dalton, drawing a gun. "Mebby you will want to snivvy this outfit, same as ther mule."

"Mebby I will; and why not?"

"Because et's mine by right of capture. one reason."

"Et is, hey? Wull, now, who discovered et first?"

"Mebby I sighted et about as quick as you did. But, that don't made no difference; hoss and gal aire mine, and I'm goin' to take 'em to Bald Eagle with me; that's what!"

"You bet et's what!" cried Mat Baldwin, who had mounted and now appeared on the other side of the young woman.

"Wull, mebby we will have somethin' to say about that 'ar," cried Hud Miller. "Do you think we aire goin' to allow you to come to Hard Luck and carry off a prize like this hyer?"

"Somebody is goin' to git hurt ef we don't," intimated Dalton. "You notice, mebby, that we hold the drop on ye."

"Yas, I see ye do—"

"Then open a swath fur us to pass through, or by Judas we'll begin to mow one!"

The mayor of Bald Eagle was not lacking for nerve. It required much nerve for him and his bower to take the stand they were taking.

The young woman had remained silent, but now she broke forth in piteous pleading to be released from her position.

"For God's sake, have mercy on me and free me," she cried. "Can you not see that I am nearly dead? I beg of you, men, do not allow him to carry out his intention and make me ride further in my condition. For God's sake take me down and carry me indoors somewhere—anywhere!"

"By gad, we will!" cried a voice.

A grizzled old fellow, Jim Plunket, stepped forward, between Mat Baldwin and the prisoner, unmindful of the weapons.

The mayor of Bald Eagle turned toward him instantly.

"Do you want to die, old man?"

No sooner had he removed the "drop" from Hud Miller and turned it upon the other, than Hud whipped out a gun and jumped forward.

"Do you?" he roared.

His gun was pressing the mayor of Bald Eagle in the ribs pretty severely, and his bower turning to look, Ned Gillins was upon him like a cat upon a rat.

"Don't move!" he shouted, "or to glory you go!"

"That's what's what!" cried some fellow in the crowd. "Down off'm their hosses with em, and fetch a rope!"

Old Jim, by his brave move having made it possible for Miller and his right-hand man to get the advantage, was giving all his attention to the young woman; he was cutting the cords that bound her to the horse.

"No, no; we ain't that sort," cried the mayor of the camp; "we'll give 'em free leave to git right out, ef they have got hoss sense enough to know when they aire well off."

"You have got the advantage," growled Dalton. "It is the whole camp of ye against us two."

"You bet! Put up them 'ar guns!"

They obeyed. The pressure of a gun in the region of the fifth rib was a powerful persuader.

At the moment they put up their weapons there came an exclamation from Plunket, who had now released the young woman.

"Git out of the way, boys; this gal needs a woman's attention, and I'll carry her to my cabin. Make room thar!" he cried.

Instinctively, the crowd fell back, and Old Jim hastened away with his burden. And as he went, the mayor of Bald Eagle turned upon the mayor of Hard Luck, saying:

"I guess that don't settle the matter 'tween you and me, Hud Miller."

"Et is settled fer you, fer this time, anyhow, Buck Dalton."

"But we'll meet again. It is war."

"So be et."

CHAPTER V.

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD.

Buck Dalton and his bower rode away in the direction of the gorge, their faces dark and vengeful.

"Et was no use, Buck," said Baldwin, as they rode off. "We made a bold bluff, but their hand was too big fer ours."

"Yes; we had no show, of course, and yet we might have carried the point if that old galoot hadn't chipped in on us the way he did."

"That's so. I meant to see ye through with et, anyhow. What will you do about et now?"

"What will I do about et? I am goin' to have that gal, that's what!"

"Well, I don't blame ye, but how will ye get her?"

"Steal her, if possible."

"And if not?"

"Then we'll fight for her."

"I wouldn't go about et too brash, Buck."

"You wouldn't? Would you let Hud Miller and his gang ride over ye?"

"I would hold myself in till I had done fer Deadwood Dick first, and then go fer the gal."

"And meantime leave the prize in Hud Miller's hands, hey? Not by a big sight! Et is war to the knife between Bald Eagle and Hard Luck, now!"

"Wull, ef that is yer mind, et goes,

of course, and you kin count on me fer all thar is in me. Hello! who is this hyer comin' after us? Durn me ef we ain't clean ferrot Bob Ginger!"

Such was the fact; in the excitement preceding their departure, they had forgotten the messenger from Bald Eagle.

They now stopped and waited for him to come up.

"A wonder you fellers wouldn't run off and leave a galoot in limbo," Ginger complained. "I drawed a gun to help ye, but haff a dozen of 'em wur poked down my throat before I could wink."

"It was every man for himself, Ginger," said Buck. "We wur only three against the hull camp of 'em."

"But, thar is blood on the moon, mayor, sure as you alre born," Ginger informed.

"What do you mean?"

"Hud Miller takes up what you said. Et will be camp against camp, now, and the Old Nick fer both."

"Just what we were talkin' about. I was just sayin' to Mat, that et is war to the knife between us and the galoots of Hard Luck, now, and we must win."

"And you bet we will win, too!" asseverated the messenger. "Et is lucky that we have got Deadwood Dick dead to rights before the fun begins."

"Ef we have," qualified Baldwin.

"Do you think we ain't?" demanded Ginger.

"Well, I won't be surprised if it turns out that that galoot at Hard Luck is him after all."

"I don't believe et is," asserted Dalton. "I did have a doubt at first, but when you come to think of et, a fellow can't add years to his age at will."

"Deadwood Dick kin do anything."

"There is one thing he won't do; he won't get out alive, if he pokes his nose into Skeleton Gorge region; we'll make him as dead as that grinning skeleton up thar between the boulders," declared Dalton, venomously.

They had reached that point in the gorge where the skeleton was.

Glancing up, following the direction of Dalton's finger, they saw the grinning death's-head and the gleaming bones in the dull light of the canyon.

Even as they gazed, a voice, deep-toned and uncanny, apparently coming from the skeleton itself, startled and dismayed them, and nothing but shame of their weakness prevented their fleeing the spot.

"Men of Bald Eagle, stand!"

Such was the command, and, with a look at one another, they drew rein, with faces blanched.

"What ther blazes?" gasped Ginger.

"The skeleton spoke, as I live!" averred Baldwin.

"Nonsense!" cried Dalton. "Thar's a man up thar, some'rs."

"Men of Bald Eagle, give heed! Attend my words," came the voice again.

"Out with et!" blustered Dalton, making a showing of nerve. "You had better come out and show yourself, 'stead of skulking behind a rock."

"You see all that remains of me. In life I met my fate here, and in death I have remained watch and guard of the canyon."

"You're a durn liar!" shouted Baldwin. "What alre ye talkin' with, yer jaw bone?"

"It is the spirit that speaks."

"I reckon I had jist as lief ride on about my business," said Ginger, in a low tone. "What say, captain?"

"Don't show the white feather,"

snarled Dalton. "It is a man, I tell ye, and I am going to see the thing through before I leave here. We must have him out of that."

"All right. Ef you kin stand et mebbly I kin."

"Now, then, say what ye have got to say," Dalton called out. "Cut it short, though, fer time is money."

"Your days are numbered, and your place will soon know you no more forever. Be warned," was the solemn response.

The trio looked at one another, and their faces betrayed their fear.

What did it mean?

Buck Dalton had to do something to try to reassure his comrades, though he was as badly frightened as they.

Jerking his guns from his belt, with a muttered imprecation, he opened fire upon the skeleton of the gorge. The only effect was a mocking laugh from above.

"Cuss ye!" he cried. "Ye dar'n't come out and show yerself!"

"You see all there is of me!"

"Ye lie!"

Again that horrible laugh.

Baldwin and Ginger were on the point of dashing off, but Dalton restrained them.

"Don't be fools nur chickens!" he cried. "We'll see who et is before we go a foot further, or know the reason. I'm goin' up thar, sure as my name is Buck Dalton!"

"You don't mean et?"

For answer, Dalton threw himself from the saddle, and, with a gun in his teeth, began scaling the rocks.

"You stay where ye are!" he presently paused to say, "and ef ye see a head, don't fail to put a vent-hole in et. I'll have him out of thar ef I give up ther ghost a-doin' et!"

"Thou fool!" came the voice again. "You know you are safe, because you know I am a spirit. Go on your way, and when you come to your destination, release a prisoner whom you have there imprisoned. This do, and it will be well with you. Refuse, and it will be at your peril. I have spoken."

"I'll peril you!" retorted Dalton. "I mean to have you out of there!"

A laugh, that now sounded far, far away, was the only rejoinder.

CHAPTER VI.

HANS, THE DUTCHMAN.

Buck persisted, and climbed to the point where the skeleton was lodged between the boulders.

He had called again to his men to keep their eyes wide open, but to take care not to hit him if they saw anything to shoot at. But, the precaution was not needed. They saw nothing.

Nor did Buck himself find anything.

There was the skeleton, in the dark, dank crevice, with the vines and scrubs supporting it, but nowhere a sign that any one had been near the spot.

He looked sharply and searchingly around; but to no purpose, and finally, felled, descended to where his men were awaiting him.

"Et was a ghost, sure enough," declared Ginger.

"Ghost ncthin'!" from Dalton. "Thar ain't no sech thing as a ghost. Et was a man."

"How was et a man if he wasn't thar?" inquired Baldwin. "I am plenty ready to go on, mayor, if you are ready to give the word: what say?"

"Go on, then!"

They started, and no grass grew under their feet during the rest of the way through the canyon.

When they rode into Bald Eagle, their coming was greeted with a loud cheer, and they noted that a big crowd was gathered before the Corn Crib saloon.

"Hyer they come!" was the shout.

"Hooray!"

"What kin be up now?" queried the right bower.

"We'll soon find out. There is one thing we are sure of now."

"What is that, boss?" asked Ginger.

"That the chap you have got in jaff here is either Deadwood Dick or one of his allies. I have been thinkin' as we rode along."

"You think so?" asked Mat.

"Yes, and that voice in the gorge is the proof of it. If that wasn't Deadwood Dick, then it was one of a gang he has brought hyer, and we have got our hands full—or will have."

He was right!

"If we don't nip et in the bud," said Ginger.

"That's what we'll do, by Judas!"

In a few moments they drew rein before the Corn Crib.

"Hyer he is!" shouted one man. "Ther durn galoot tried to git away, but we nabbed him, and we thought we had better keep our hands on him till you got hyer."

"Yaw, yas, dot vas right!" spoke up a stranger, who was a prisoner in the center of the throng, a big, Dutch-looking man, whose accent was in keeping with his appearance. "Hans Donnerwelt never like to be in prison, you pet, und you pet you can't keep him dhere."

"The prisoner!" exclaimed Bob Ginger.

"And you say he got out of the jail?" demanded the mayor. "How did he get out?"

"That is what's puzzlin' us hyer," asserted the spokesman for the crowd. "Sam Kelly happened to meet him as he was takin' to the hills, and as Sam had a gun and Dutchy had none, he held him up and brought him back."

"Good for you, Kelly!" complimented the mayor. "But, you say you don't know how ne got out?"

"Not a bit; et's a stumper."

"Was the door broke? Was the window—"

"Thar was nothin', and the door was locked jist as we had left et. I tell ye et is a mystery, mayor."

"That settles it! We are sure of our man. Nobody but Deadwood Dick could play a trick like that."

"Unless id vas Hans Donnerwelt," spoke up the prisoner. "I tell you id vas no use put me in chail; I ged out every times, ain'dt id?"

"You won't get out this time, I can promise you that," averred Dalton. "But, who and what are you? What are you doin' hyer? What business brought you to Bald Eagle?"

"Der peesness I comes me here by? Vielllicht, id vas none your peesness! I lose me mein vay, und here I finds me meinself, dot vas all. You pet I not comes here on purpose, not if I knows meinself, vielllicht, ich denke. Vhat you vas goin' do apoudt id?"

"We mean to hang you, that's what!"

"Ach! Potz tausend! Vhat have I done? You locks a man oop in chail und keep from der poosom his family oudt, und den because he preak oudt und vant to go home, you hang him. Ach wehe!"

"See here, we want no shamming!"

cried Dalton. "Are you Deadwood Dick or not?"

"Vas I vhat?"

"Deadwood Dick! There is no use your playing it off, for it won't go down with us. If you are not Deadwood Dick, then you are one of his pimps, and it means your death jest the same."

The crowd gave its stamp of approval by a shout.

The prisoner looked all about him in a wondering manner, his face a picture of alarm and surprise.

"Ich nicht versteh," he declared. "I know me not vhat you vas talking apoudt. I set me oudt for Phoenix, und first I know I find meinselt in—vell, a blace I not mention."

"You say you were going to Phoenix?"

"Yaw, dot vas so."

"You live there?"

"Yaw."

"And you are sure you lie?"

"Yaw, yaw, dot vas so, I schvare."

The whoop of laughter that went up from the crowd made the Teuton stare in wonder.

Dalton and his bower consulted, and when the uproar subsided a little the mayor said:

"Well, we are goin' to give you a chance. We'll hold on to you, but we'll send a man to Phoenix to inquire about you, and if you have told us a straight story we'll let you go."

"Gottlob! Und vill you dell mein frau I vas alive und kicking, und kiss mein kinder fur mich?"

"What's ther use, mayor?" cried Baldwin, at that. "Can't you see he is genuine?"

"You think there is no chance for his being Deadwood Dick?"

"Not the slightest, I'll gamble."

"But, he may be a pard of his, and if we let him go there will be the merry thunder to pay. No, I'll take no chances."

"And mebbly you aire right, after that voice in ther canyon," Ginger supplemented.

"And the way he got out of jail hyer," added the spokesman of those who surrounded the prisoner.

"No, I would be a fool to let him go, after what we know and what we have good reason to expect," cried Dalton. "To the jail with him!"

"And guard him," added the right bower.

"But, mein frau—mein kinder!" cried the Dutchman, desperately, as he was dragged away. "Send a man to Phoenix, like you said, und you find oudt I vas all right, vielleicht."

Dalton was on the point of making rejoinder, when something new claimed his attention.

Just coming into the gulch where Bald Eagle was situate, approaching from the east, the opposite direction from Skeleton Gorge, were two horsemen—no, one was a woman.

They came on at a slow pace, and as they drew nearer it was noticed that the man was well along in years, while the woman was not more than twenty, at a guess, and good-looking.

Who were they and what their mission? Two questions that forced themselves upon the mayor of Bald Eagle.

CHAPTER VII.

STRANGERS MADE WELCOME.

The strangers came on and stopped before the Corn Crib.

"Welcome to Bald Eagle!" said the mayor of the camp, doffing his hat and bowing to the lady.

"Can we find rest and shelter here? and are you honest men?" asked the man. "We have come far, and have lost our way, I fear."

Many of the denizens of the camp grinned on hearing the inquiry respecting their honesty.

"Honest?" echoed Buck Dalton. "You don't have to go no further, old man, to find honesty; we have that quality to a man."

"I am glad for the assurance. Will you help my daughter down?"

"With delight, sir."

The mayor of Bald Eagle stepped nimbly forward and offered his hands, and the young woman was assisted to the ground.

The man got out of the saddle slowly and stiffly, as if infirm or sore from long riding, or both, and when on his feet he hobbled rather than walked in the direction of the hotel.

They left the horses in the hands of men who had stepped forward to take them.

"Will ye allow me?" said Dalton, crooking his elbow at the lady.

He was offering his arm to her.

"I will deem it more a kindness, sir, if you will assist my poor father," she said. "He is tortured with rheumatism."

"Here, you, Mat, and you, Ginger," Buck ordered, "you assist the old gent while I escort the lady. Lift him along gently, too, or the worse fur ye!"

The mayor himself conducted the young lady to the entrance of the rude "shebang."

There she stopped, thanking him, and waited for her father.

He was soon with her.

"I'll be better after I have rested," said the old gentleman. "It stiffens me up to ride so long. Greatly obliged, gentlemen, for your kindness, until better repaid."

"Don't mention it, sir," spoke up Dalton. "You want rooms hyer, of course."

"If they are to be had."

"Set ye down, and I'll see about et and save ye the trouble."

They sat down on a bench by the side of the door, and Dalton disappeared within.

Idlers stood around, gaping at the strangers, as if they were something of a curiosity at Bald Eagle.

Presently the mayor reappeared.

"The house is crowded," he said, "but I have fixed it all right. I will give up my own room to you, and a shakedown will be laid in the hall for your daddy—"

"I know your intentions are the best, sir," the girl interrupted, "but that arrangement will not do. My father needs the bed more than I."

"But, you would not bunk in the hall, would you?" asked Dalton.

"Yes, rather than that my father should do so."

"I will not allow it, Helen."

"You cannot help it, papa. If the gentleman will allow you to take his room, I can take care of myself in the hall. I am young and hardy, and will sleep like a top."

"Well, you are welcome to the room, sir, of course," said the mayor.

"Oh! thank you, sir," responded the girl. "We will retire to it at once, if we may. We can occupy it together till night, you know."

"Certainly; come right this way."

The mayor bowed politely, and led the way into the house and up the rather shabby stairway.

Arriving at the room, its occupant hastily gathered up his own personal

effects and put them away, and delivered the key to the lady.

"There you are!" he said. "Make yourselves at home."

"That we will try to do," she promised.

"By the way, miss, are you armed?"

"Yes, sir. Why do you ask that?"

"Not to alarm you; but, it is just as well that you are armed. You may have heard, and if not I will tell you, that there are outlaws in this section."

"You do not mean there is danger?" asked the girl, with an anxious look toward her father.

"It is just as well that you are armed," was the reply.

"We have faced dangers before, my daughter," said the old man. "And here, among honest men, there can be nothing to fear."

"Oh! we'll stand by ye, to a man," declared the mayor, "but, at the same time, I thought it best to put ye on yer guard. I suppose ye know how to use yer gun, miss?"

"I hope I shall have no occasion to prove it," she replied.

"I hope not," agreed the mayor, and with a bow he turned to leave the room.

"A word before you go, sir," spoke up the old gentleman.

"Certainly."

"I must ask you a question that I have asked thousands of times in my journey—do you know where my son is?"

"Your son—"

"In a few words I can explain, sir. For a year I have been trying to find him, but he has eluded my search thus far, believing that the officers of the law are after him."

"What is his name?"

"Russell Cary, sir."

"Never heard the name before."

"The same old answer. But, we'll find him, Helen; we'll find him if we travel forever!"

"What's he like?" inquired Dalton. "He may be under an assumed name, you know."

Mr. Cary gave a brief description of his son.

"I don't reckon I have seen him, but I will have an eye out for him."

"You can do much more than that, sir."

"What more?"

"Make it known to your whole town, and ask everybody else to be on the lookout for him. He may be found—he must be found, somewhere, somehow!"

"But, will not that course alarm him? Finding that he is so badly wanted, will he not seek to hide himself all the more completely in order to elude the officers—as you mentioned?"

"No, no! for the truth must be proclaimed at the same time, along with the inquiry. He has been found innocent, and there is no longer danger."

"Ah! now I see how it is," observed Dalton.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER INQUIRY.

Some little further talk, and the mayor of Bald Eagle left the room and sought an interview with his right bower.

He had no sooner gone than the young woman sat down on the edge of the bed with a weary sigh.

"I wonder if we shall ever find her?" she asked, as if to herself.

"Alas! I do not know, I do not know."

The old man made response in like manner, but more as if speaking to himself.

That there was something more than

they had made known to Buck Dalton was positive. Of him, the old man had inquired for a son; now they both mourned "her."

What did it mean? What mystery was here?

Buck found his bower in the saloon, and drew him off to one side for a talk.

"Mat," he said, "I am right in it, now, with a little of your help and some of the boys to assist."

"All right, captain, I think I smell the game; but what is yer scheme? How are ye goin' to go about et?"

"You know well enough what et is, so no need to dwell upon that. But she carries a gun, and I'll bet she knows how to use et, too."

"We'll have to look out fer that."

"I have paved the way by tellin' her there are outlaws hyerabouts, you see."

"Ha! ha! And you have promised her your protection, I suppose?"

"That is a part of the scheme, my boy."

"Well, let's have the rest of it, then."

"Plain and simple, Mat, and I am goin' to trust et all to you. You will play the role of captain, and come in about midnight, or later, and carry off the prize."

"I see, and mebbly git et in the neck."

"Nonsense. You can trick her somehow, if she is awake. But, we'll find her asleep, all right. She will not wake up till she is nabbed, and then it will be too late. It will be a dead easy game for you."

"And what about the old man?"

"I will take care of him. But, that will all come in later; I must first of all do the rescue act."

"And where do I come in?"

"Well, if they carry any collateral, you can have that."

"And you take the gal?"

"That is my plan. She is a fine one, and will please me even better than that one at Hard Luck."

"I thought that was yer little game, captain, and I'm willin' to see ye through with et on the terms mentioned. Of course, et will be a shock to the gal if the outlaws kill her dad."

"Naturally."

"And she'll need a protector."

"Of course."

"And you'll step right in and offer yourself."

"Just so."

"Big scheme, captain, and bound to win, I think. And I get what is in it in the way of cash."

"That is the bargain."

"Then I'm your potato, and you can tell the band to strike up and let ther performance begin whenever you get ready."

"You will take her to the cabin on the cliff, and I hold you responsible for her safe keeping. If you harm her, this country won't be big enough to hide you from my vengeance, Mat Baldwin!"

"I'm not altogether a fool."

"That is all right, but I wanted to warn you. You are the one responsible for her."

"Say no more about et. What then?"

"Why, I'll track ye thar, and we'll have a sham battle, a reg'lar red-hot one, but no one will get hurt, you see."

"Of course."

"Then I'll win et, and break in with my men and you'll take to your heels and dust out as if the devil or a lawyer wur after ye, and I'll rescue the gal, to the tune of red fire and slow music, and all that—you know."

"I know, you bet! I'll do my part all right."

"That is all, then. Pick your men and get ready on the quiet, and I will post the rest of the boys here what's goin' to take place."

Meantime Henry Cary and his daughter had partaken of dinner.

Buck Dalton, on parting with his bower, found the young lady sitting on the apology for a piazza which the hotel sported.

Doffing his hat, he advanced and greeted her.

"Will you permit me to sit down?" he asked.

"You have that right, sir, without the asking, I should think, being the mayor of the place," she said, graciously. "Sit down, certainly, and let me again thank you for your goodness."

The young lady felt, instinctively, that he was a villain—indeed, his appearance so labeled him, and she hoped to say or do nothing that would tend to rouse his resentment.

"Do you mind telling me more about that brother of yours?" he made inquiry, upon being seated.

"What do you care to know?"

"Well, what was the crime he was supposed to have done?"

"It was a murder."

"Whew! that was serious enough. And you say it has been shown that he didn't do it?"

"Yes, it has been amply, doubly proven, and he has been cleared, but he is still in hiding, somewhere, and we have been unable to get the slightest clew to him."

"I wish I could help you."

"Yes, I wish you could, but I begin to fear he must be dead."

"That may be, but I would not look on the dark side of it until really forced to do so."

"Oh! I try not to, sir. I bear up for papa's sake, and I would not mention that to him for the world; for he loved Russell so; he was the light of his life, it seemed."

"How was he cleared of the crime?"

"Why, a written confession was sent by one who admitted that he had done the deed, and, besides, an alibi was furnished for my brother."

"That was enough, I should say."

"Either was enough, for the one who confessed stated things that no one but the murderer could know."

"And what was the motive for the crime?"

"I do not care to dwell upon that, sir."

"Oh, as you please; I would not urge it. Well, I sincerely hope that I can be of use to you, miss."

She was regarding him more favorably, since he was using his best language and seemed less rude and uncouth in so doing. But it was only a mask.

"And so do I. If it would be of any use, sir, I would tell you more, but it would not. I begin to believe that I may regard you as a true friend, should I need one—"

"You can lay your last chip on that, miss," was the interruption.

"Then tell me, have you heard the name of Danson—Abner Danson, in any of your travels? He is another person I desire to find. In fact, to find him is as important to me as to find my brother."

"Maybe they are one and the same—"

"No, no, they are not, believe me; and yet it is as important to me to find

the one as the other. Have you ever heard the name?"

"No, I never have," avowed Dalton, a dark look shadowing his brow as he said it. The thought that entered his mind was that this Danson must be a lover—that he had a rival!

CHAPTER IX.

BIG SURPRISE FOR HARD LUCK.

Buck Dalton would have pressed the point further, but at that moment there came an interruption.

Men ran up from the direction of the jail in which Dutch Hans had been confined, calling out the mayor's name as they came.

"Well, what's broke loose now?" demanded Dalton.

"Ther prisoner has broke loose, that's what, and skipped!"

"Skipped? And you there on guard? Then you have had a hand in it, that's all!"

"But, we don't know how he got out. We wur right in front of the door, the hull lot of us, and he sartain didn't go that way."

"He must have gone that way; there was no other way for him to get out. You have been asleep, the whole lot of you, and in broad daylight, too!"

"No, captain, honest—"

"Bah! It is either that, or you let him go."

"Who was it, sir?" inquired Miss Cary.

"A rascal we had in the jail here. You will excuse me?"

"Certainly, sir."

Buck lifted his hat and hurried off with his men, and quite a crowd ran in the direction of the jail.

The door was now open, and it was certain that there was no one within. The mayor looked to satisfy himself that the man was really gone, and shook his head in a puzzled manner.

"This beats the deal!" he muttered.

"If I thought you wur lyin'—"

But his men protested their innocence so strongly that he was forced to believe them.

"And the second time he has done the trick," the mayor growled. "It is proof of one thing, anyhow; it is proof that he was Deadwood Dick."

"Impossible!" demurred his bower.

"There is nothin' impossible with that man."

"He couldn't make himself look like that feller, if he had soaked in sauerkraut fer a month."

He had seen Deadwood Dick.

"And I tell you he can do anything, if the half that I have heard and read about him be true. But he shall not get away; out and after him!"

"Which way?"

"Every way. Head him off if possible. And, not only him, but scoop in any other strangers you fall in with, no matter who or what. You hear me?"

Dalton was in a rage, and his men moved lively.

His bower took charge and began directing the men, while Dalton himself strode back to the Corn Crib.

"I'll be hanged if I understand it," he still mumbled. "If I thought my men were traitors to me, by heavens there would be some funerals here at short notice!"

Meantime, the Dutchman was speeding away in the direction of Hard Luck as fast as his legs could carry him.

He eluded pursuit, and in due time reached there.

"Py chiminy coosecrease!" he exclaimed, as he dashed panting into the leading public place of that camp, "Dot vas ein close shave, vielleicht!"

To his surprise, every man of the place was on his feet with a gun in hand, and Hans found every gun aimed at himself.

"Mein gootness! Vhet der matter vas, anyhow? Have I run me into another lunatic asylum, maybe?"

"Give an account of yourself, plum instant!" cried Mayor Miller, glaring at him with his one eye. "Who and what aire ye?"

"Don't shoot!" cried Hans, putting up his hands and flourishing them frantically. "Eferybody don't shoot! Ich bin nur ein honest Dutchmans, vhat lost his vay und can nicht einmal heim some more found, ain't it?"

"Talk United States, you fool, talk United States!" roared the mayor.

"What is yer name, and what are ye doin' hyer?"

"Hans Donnerwelt ist mein name, und ich wurde zu—Potz tausend! Vhen I tink in English I speak me oudt in Deutsch, und vhen ich im Deutsch glaub—Ach! Ach! Mein Gott! Mein Gott! Id vas enough to make a man crazy, py chiminy coosecrease!"

"Look here! What we want to know is whether or not you are Deadwood Dick!"

"Teadwood Tick! Mein Gott! I yust now preak me mit chail oudt pecause I vas Teadwood Tick, und now I comes here und maybe preaks me mit chail in pecause I vas Teadwood Tick. Who der doose vas Teadwood Tick, anyvay, vielleicht?"

"You mean to tell us you have been in jail?"

"Yaw, dot vas so; but dey no keep me dhere, pecause I must be Phoenix angekommen to see meine frau und kinder. I set me oudt for Phoenix, but I pring oop in hot places. I preak me mit der chail oudt, und run like doose, und now I vas Teadwood Tick again."

"And they thought ye wur Deadwood Dick at Bald Eagle?"

"Yaw, dot vas so."

"And you are not?"

"Chiminy! No!"

"But you live at Phoenix?"

The Teuton gave the assurance that he did, and, little by little, he yielded up about the same report of himself as he had given at Bald Eagle.

"What d'ye think of him, Ned?" asked Miller, turning to his right-hand man.

"No Deadwood Dick about him."

"But shall we let him go?"

"Do as you please about et."

"This hyer is a time to have a wary eye out fer all strangers."

"Yes, I know et, but Deadwood Dick couldn't make a Dutchman of himself fer a fact, could he?"

"And there is no getting around the point that this feller is one of the genuine stripe. Still, he may be a pard of Deadwood Dick's, and I think we had better—"

"Mein gootness! Mein gootness!" cried Hans. "You no dake mein vort? Vell, den, lock me oop; but I pray you, shentlemans, send somepody on to Phoenix to let meine frau und kinder know I vas right side oop mit care anyhow, maybe."

The mayor was on the point of rejoining to that, but Jim Plunket at that moment came up in a rather excited state.

"Hooray fer Hard Luck, mayor, hooray!" he cried.

"What's ther matter?" demanded Hud.

"We top over Bald Eagle now, fer sertain. A bouncin' baby boy has jist been born at my cabin—"

"What! What's that yer say?"

"That's what I said; a bouncin' baby boy—ther gal that kem in on ther hoss, ye know. Oh! I tell ye we aire right in et, now, and Bald Eagle can't hold a candle to us, you bet!"

Every man looked at his neighbor in sheer amaze, as the truth dawned upon them, and the heinous deed of the man who had bound her upon the horse and sent her there was seen in its true light. There was silence for half a minute, broken at last by the mayor.

CHAPTER X.

A MEETING IN SKELETON GORGE.

"Don't move, or you're a dead man!"

"And you the same! Abner Danson, we are face to face at last!"

"We are face to face, but there is evidently a mistake, my good fellow, for that is not my name."

Down in the depths of Skeleton Gorge two men had come suddenly face to face, each evidently having come upon the other unawares, and both had been quick to "draw."

One of these was a young man, maybe twenty-two years of age, with beardless face, rather good-looking; the other was older, perhaps thirty.

The latter had a mustache, and had keen, magnetic black eyes that glinted and flashed in the semi-darkness like sable diamonds.

This one had been the quicker of the two in bringing his "gun" to bear, and if any advantage rested with either, he possessed it. The tube of his revolver looked the other squarely between the eyes.

It was the younger man who had spoken first.

He now leaned forward and took a closer look at the features of the man before him.

"By heavens! I could have taken oath it was he," he declared. "Beg pardon, stranger, whoever you are; am glad I didn't shoot."

"I would have read your intention in your eyes before ever you could have pulled the trigger," said the other, "and you would have been dead before you could have done it."

"Well, put up your gun; I have no quarrel with you."

Who is this Abner Danson you took me for? What has he done to you that you are gunning for him?"

"It is a private matter, and you are a stranger to me, sir."

"All the same, I might prove your friend, if you are in the right in a matter of right against wrong. However, don't tell me unless you feel so inclined."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Ned Rixby. And yours?"

"Russell Cary."

"You strike me as being an honest chap; here's my hand."

"Before you take mine, let me tell you that there is a price upon my head—a hunted, hounded man."

"The deuce!"

"Yet as innocent of the crime that has been laid to my charge as a babe unborn, I took you to be the murderer,

whom I am trying, single-handed, to bring to justice."

"Then give me your hand, if that is all. I care not how many prices are on your head, if you are innocent. It may be that I can be of some help to you."

They now shook hands.

"Well, I will tell you the story," said young Cary, "though it is not much of a story to tell, and if you care then to aid me I'll be only too glad to be helped."

"Very well; fire away."

"Which way were you going?"

"In the direction of Bald Eagle."

"Then we'll go on together while we talk."

Turning their faces in that direction, they set forth.

"Abner Danson was in love with my sister, and had a rival who was my enemy. Not that I liked Danson, for I did not, but I had a personal reason to hate the other man. The rival and I met and quarreled violently one night, and the next morning he was found dead and I was arrested for the murder."

"I knew, in my own mind, that Danson was the guilty one, but had no direct proof then, so kept still. I was assisted to escape jail, and took advantage of the opportunity to get away. That, of course, must have made my guilt appear positive. I have been in hiding ever since, till at last I have located my enemy and am now looking for him."

"In striking him, however, I strike also my sister, for she married the scoundrel, it appears, against father's wishes, and left home with him. I have just discovered her. But I cannot stop for that; the stain is upon my good name. I know that Danson purposely put the crime upon me, even though it was he who aided me to escape from jail, and he has got to clear me of the stain, no matter what the result to him."

"It is an interesting case," said Ned Rixby.

"And it would have terminated right here, if you had been he, as I took you to be."

"You are sure you have located him?"

"Yes; I have found my sister, and of course he must be near, but she tries to shield him from me, as would be natural."

"And she knows of the crime?"

"Yes, but she will not believe her husband guilty."

"And she would allow the stain to remain upon you, rather than let you face him?"

"No; she promises to see that I am cleared, after I have gone away, if there is anything Danson can do to clear me. It is a mixed affair, as you can see."

"It appears to be, certainly."

"Well, do you think that I am in the right or in the wrong?"

"Why, there can be no question about that, if you are innocent, as you declare you are."

"I am innocent, I swear to that. But I mean, with respect to my sister: Ough! I go on, carrying the burden of guilt, and put it upon her husband and bring grief to her by so doing?"

"It seems that your mind was made up, when we met."

"So it is. No, nothing can turn me aside from my purpose, knowing that I am in the right, not even love for my sister."

"I take it this man must look something like me."

"Well, at first glance. He is about your age and size, and has a mustache—

or had such the last time I saw him. I was mistaken when I met you here in this half gloom."

"Hold up hyer, you galoots!"

That order brought the two men to a sudden standstill, and they found themselves covered by half a dozen guns.

"Hello!" exclaimed Rixby. "What's the matter now?"

"You aire cur prisoners, that's all. We want ye."

"Then are you a band of the rascals infesting this region?"

"No, we ain't no outlaws, but we aire out gunnin' fer jist that sort o' game. Lucky you ain't fallen into other hands, or ye might part with yer wealth."

"Ha! ha! The little we carry would make nobody rich."

"Well, have ye seen anything of a big Dutch feller goin' this way? He is the chap we aire after, though we mean to let nothin' escape."

"No; we have seen nobody of the sort," spoke up young Cary.

"You aire sure about that?"

"What reason would we have for lying to you?"

"Wull, I dunno, unless you and the aforesaid Dutcheys happened to be in cahoots."

"We are right here, all there are of us," said Rixby. "And now that you have arrested us, what do you propose doing with us?"

"We're goin' to walk ye to Bald Eagle, that's what, and thar ye will have to stand trial on suspicion of bein' outlaws. We aire bound to rid this region of all sech."

"Do we look like outlaws?"

"Et ain't a question of how ye look or don't look; et will be how ye prove up that will tell ther tale. Ther chief of ther band is tryin' to p'tend that he is Deadwood Dick, ther great detective, and so Deadwood Dick is ther chap we aire after."

Did they but know it, they were nearer their game here than they had been at all, for "Ned Bixby" and Deadwood Dick, Jr., were one.

CHAPTER XI.

HUD MILLER'S RESOLVE.

To turn again to the camp of Hard Luck and the scene we left there.

It was the mayor who shouted:

"A boy baby! Three cheers fer our camp, boys! Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! This hyer is the biggest thing on ice, this is, and we'll have to send a delegation over to Bald Eagle to break the news to 'em!"

"Can't ther public purse stand a treat on et?" some one suggested.

"That's jist what et kin," assured the mayor, his single eye dancing with delight. "Sure it is a boy, Plunket?"

"Yes, that's what et aire; and a bouncer, too."

"Hooray! A horn for every man at the Hard Luck, boys, and the camp foots the bill."

There was instantly a rush for the saloon, to do honor to the greatest event the camp had ever known, and for the time being Hans was forgotten.

Thus left, a stranger stepped forward and addressed him.

It was Wilson Horn, the mule owner.

"My friend, how d' do? Can you see that you and I look anything alike?"

"Are you another crazy mans?" inquired the Dutchman, holding back his hand, as if loth to make acquaintance. "Py shimminy coosecrease, ich habe genug hatte—"

"You will have to speak in English, my good man, if you want me to understand you," interrupted Horn.

"I say I have enough of all dis foolish peesness."

"Well, I am not a crazy man, as you hint."

"Py chimminy coosecrease, I vas gladt mit dot, anyvay. Yaw, I shake me hands mit you."

"And now answer my question," said the assumed lawyer.

"Vhat was dot?"

"Do we look anything alike?"

"Mein gootness, no!"

"And yet it appears that we have both been taken for the same man."

"Is dot so? Vas you tooken to pe dot Teadwood Ticks, too? Py chimminy, I knowed dey vas all crazy peebles!"

"Yes, and I believe that I would now be languishing in jail if it had not been for the timely interruption. A man came here at breakneck pace to say that Deadwood Dick was a prisoner at Bald Eagle."

"Und dot Teadwood Tick vas me."

"Even so."

"Vell, who vas Teadwood Tick, anyvay?"

"Why, he must be an outlaw whose name stands for everything that is bad."

"Mein gootness! Und do I look me like I vas so pad as dot? Goot heavens! vhat vould meine frau Gretchen say, und she heard dot?"

They spoke so that the few who had lingered around them might hear, and these few laughed heartily as they followed the main body of the denizens off in the direction of the Hard Luck resort.

In due time the treat was over, and the excitement having abated, the mayor looked around for his prisoners.

Those who had seen them last told what they knew, but nothing of their whereabouts at the moment was known. A hasty tour of the few resorts of the camp was made, but they were not forthcoming.

"What is ther meanin' of this hyer?" demanded the mayor.

"I opine et means that they have skipped out, Hud," observed Ned Gillins.

"What would they skip out fer?"

"A wonder ef they wouldn't, after the scare they got."

"But, what did they know about each other?"

Here, then, came in the evidence of those who had heard the conversation between Horn and the Dutchman.

"I guess you aire right, Ned," said Miller. "Et is plain that they ain't neither one Deadwood Dick, if that is the way they talked, and et is as plain that they don't belong to his gang."

"Mebby et is, so ye can't be sure of nothin' when ye are bettin' against Deadwood Dick."

"Wull, them fellers has got to be found," declared Miller. "Get after 'em, a dozen or so of ye, and overhaul 'em afore they kin git fur away."

"Not likely they will go to Bald Eagle, is et?"

"Mebby not; ef they do I'll see to 'em, fer I am goin' thar, to pay a visit to Buck Dalton and crow over him. Come, git a gait on, you sons-of-snails, and do somethin'!"

There was some lively moving around when Hud Miller snarled at them in that fashion.

Miller and Ned Gillins drew apart from the others.

"What is to be done with the gal?" Gillins asked.

"Why, let Plunket take keer of her."

"I know, fer now; but later? Somebody has got a claim on her, ye know, and now thar's the baby."

"Where's Plunket? Let's hear what the gal has to say about et herself."

"There he goes. Hi! Jim! Come here."

Old Jim Plunket joined them.

"What is et?" he asked.

"Ther gal at your cabin," said Miller. "What about her?"

"That is et—what about her?"

"Wall, she is thar, with ther durnedest, bouncingest—"

"Yes, yes, that's all right; but what has she to say fer herself? I want to git at that."

"Well, she ain't got much to say, fer a fact."

"Have ye asked her about herself?"

"Yes; but she is as mum as a Piute peterfied."

"What is her name?"

"Her front name is Sarah, and that is all the name she will give us."

"And she won't tell her story?"

"No; she is jist as I said on that p'int."

"And ye can't git nothin' out of her?"

"No. All she asks is to be took keer of till she kin git up and dust out for herself, and she don't want anybody to know where she is."

"And well she mought be, I should say. Well, you take double good care of her, Jim, and if any galoot comes questionin' or pokin' around, nab him and run him into the cooler till I git back. I'm goin' over to crow at Buck Dalton on this big event."

"You kin bet your life she'll be taken keer of! Ef anybody harms her he has got to git away with Jim Plunket first!"

CHAPTER XII.

RECOGNITION REFUSED.

Mayor Miller and his right-hand man, with half a dozen picked fellows, were soon on their way to Bald Eagle.

Miller felt that Hard Luck had had such a rare streak of good luck for a change, that he could well afford to go over to Bald Eagle and crow over his rival.

Nothing occurred on their way through the canyon from the one camp to the other, but on their arrival at Bald Eagle they found that place in a great state of excitement. Preparations for a "hanging-bee" were under way, and the whole population was congregated.

We must turn back a little at this point and take up another thread in order to keep all the parts of our narrative abreast.

"Ned Rixby" and his companion were helpless.

They had been taken unawares by the half dozen fellows who covered them with their guns.

Interested in their talk, they had become lax in keeping an outlook for danger, and so had fallen an easy prey to the party from Bald Eagle in quest of Hans Donnerwelt.

While some held them covered with their guns, at such close range that it would have been foolish to try to make a break, others bound their hands, and in that fashion they were taken to Bald Eagle.

As they entered the town the captors went singing.

This was to draw the attention of the denizens of the hard hole and it was not a failure.

Before they reached the Corn Crib

the mayor and nearly all of his people were out to learn what it meant, and they saw their men approaching with the prisoners.

"They ain't got ther Dutcher," said one.

"No, but they have got two in his place," declared the mayor.

"And one is Deadwood Dick ther genuine, as I live!" cried Mat Baldwin exultantly.

"Is that so?" demanded the mayor.

"That's what et is, Buck. I know him this time, no mistake!"

The captors and prisoners were soon at hand.

"What yer got thar?" demanded Buck, dropping into the rough vernacular of the region.

"That is fer you to say, mayor. We didn't sight ther Dutchman, but we did scoop in these hyer, too, bound that nothin' should git away."

"That was right."

"Deadwood Dick, how do ye do?" saluted Mat Baldwin, stepping forward and holding out his hand to "Ned Rixby."

"Even if that were my name, I could not shake hands with you, seeing that you have taken extra good pains to bind me."

"Ha! Ha! Do ye mean to say that ain't yer name?"

The younger prisoner had given a start, on hearing the name, and was looking with real interest at his companion in tribulation.

"My name is Ned Rixby," was the rejoinder.

"Ha! Ha! You go tell that to ther cowboys. Don't ye reckon that I know so?"

"It is quite evident that you do not!"

"Aire ye sure of yer man, Mat?" asked the mayor.

"Sure of him? I kin swear to him. This is ther chap."

At that moment there came a woman's scream.

It came from the entrance to the Corn Crib, and every eye turned in that direction.

The young woman, Helen Cary, was running toward them, her arms outstretched, and as she ran she cried out:

"My brother! My brother!"

"What ther mischief?" snarled the mayor.

"Another of the gang, mebby," some man suggested.

The girl pressed right into the throng.

At first the face of the younger prisoner had flushed, but, in the next moment, it paled and a dogged expression came over it.

"Russell! Russell!"

So cried the girl, when, reaching the centre where the prisoners stood, she sprang toward the younger.

He met her with a stony stare that caused her to stop short as she was about to throw her arms around him. She hesitated only a moment, however, then she embraced him.

The crowd looked on wonderingly.

As the young man's hands were tied he could not help himself, and kisses were showered upon his face.

"Won't you speak to me?" she cried, stepping back a pace and again looking at the young man.

"You have made a mistake, miss. I don't know ye; you are evidently taking me for somebody else."

"Oh! Oh! Why will you deny me, your sister?"

"I tell you you are mistaken."

"Father! Father! Where is he? Some one bring him. You are Russell; you shall admit it."

"My name is Fred Jones, miss."

His companion, too, looked at him in a wondering manner, but was, of course, silent.

"It is Russell Cary," cried the girl. "Oh! You need not fear now, Russell; we all know you are innocent—you have been cleared."

"Don't know you," he said.

"This is the chap you told me you were in search of?" asked the mayor.

"Yes, yes! Why will you deny me, Russell?"

"I tell you my name is Jones."

"Hyar comes the old man; we'll see what he says," said some one in the crowd.

Henry Cary, having heard his daughter's wild appeal, was hastening to the scene, and a passage was made for him through the throng.

"My son!" he cried, on seeing the young prisoner.

The prisoner shook his head.

"But he will not own us, papa, he will not own us!" cried the girl. "I have assured him that we know of his innocence; that he is no longer in danger; but still he will not own me."

"Russell, you must know me, your father?"

"I tell you you are mistaken," he said.

"My name is Fred Jones, and I never saw either of you before in my life."

They looked at each other in great distress, and their faces wore troubled expressions.

"Thar is a mystery hyer," said the mayor of the camp. "Take that young feller into the house, boys, whar the old gent and the gal kin have a chance to talk with him. Meantime, we'll see about this hyer other one, and ef he proves to be—"

"Hold on," the young man objected. "We are pards, and what is done to my pard I want done to me."

"Mebby we'll hang him," intimated the mayor.

"No matter; you won't do that without a fair trial, it is not likely, and I will stand that with him. These people are mistaken; I never saw them before, and if I happen to look like some one else I can't help it."

"Off with him, as I ordered!" cried the mayor. And then to the young lady he whispered: "I do this for your sake, in case you are right. If I did not, I'd have to hang him along with this other, who is a noted outlaw." All the same, I think you must be mistaken, or he would be glad to take advantage of your recognition and save his neck."

"No no; it is he, I know it is he!" cried the girl, in low tone. "I beg you to save his life, sir."

"All right, miss; et's done!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PROOF TO THE CONTRARY.

Russell Cary was being dragged in the direction of the hotel, much against his wishes, while "Ned Rixby" was left alone to face the present danger.

Ned was rather glad that the young man had so easily escaped it. He could not understand why the young man had persisted in disowning his sister and father, when to him he had admitted who he was. Perhaps it was that he might share the danger.

He could not know just what the young man's motive was; and besides that, his

word would not be taken anyhow, so it was just as well to let matters take their course.

Russell Cary was taken into the house and the father and sister followed.

"Now, then, for you," said Buck Dalton, grimly, as he faced his remaining prisoner.

"Well, make it short and sweet," Dick coolly invited.

"What do you say your name is?"

"Ned Rixby."

"And not Deadwood Dick, eh?"

"If it is the one, it cannot be the other."

"Oh, I don't know about that; I have known men to have four or five names."

"Well, that is nothing to me. What are you going to do with me?"

"You have got to prove what ye say, or we will hang ye. We are satisfied that you are the chief of the outlaw band hyer in this region."

"You called me Deadwood Dick."

"That is the name we know this chief to be dodging under at present."

Dick smiled in a grim fashion, but said no more. It was useless to dispute the point with Dalton.

"We are goin' to search ye," announced the mayor, and he motioned for the captors to begin it; "and if you prove up Deadwood Dick, up you go."

"And if I prove up somebody else?"

"We'll let you go."

The searchers were rapidly going through his pockets, but they were unsuccessful in bringing anything to light that was proof who the man really was.

The strongest point against him was his guns, a brace of the finest imaginable.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he asked.

"Yes, we aire," spoke up Mat Baldwin.

"You have double proof, mayor, now."

"How is that, Mat?" the mayor asked.

"First place, I know him by sight; next place, these hyer are Deadwood Dick's guns."

"And you swear to both the face and the guns?"

"You bet I do."

"Do ye hear that, prisoner?"

"Yes, I hear it," was the prompt response.

"Well, it is proof dead against ye that you are the right man."

"It is the word of one witness. I suppose you are going to give me a fair trial?"

"What do ye want? the earth? What more of a trial do you expect? We have got ye dead to rights, and that is enough fer us. To ther jail with him, boys, and we'll see him later."

With that, the prisoner was dragged away, and the mayor entered the hotel.

In the dining-room the mayor found the men with the other prisoner, and the father and sister eagerly trying to force him to admit his identity.

"I tell you it is no use," the young man was saying. "I am not your son, not your brother and I hope you will take my word for it. I will have nothing more to say to you regarding the matter."

"See here," spoke up the mayor, "you say this is your son, Mr. Cary?"

"Yes, yes! my son Russell!"

"Well, it must be proven, or I'll be obliged to hang him along with that outlaw as his partner in crime."

"Heavens; no!" cried the girl.

"Spare him!" pleaded the father.

"Then let him admit his identity."

"You hear?" cried the girl. "Your life will be spared, if you will only admit who you are."

"I have told you who I am, and I can do no more than that. Let them hang

"If they want to; you will know that you were mistaken when you do find your son."

"Is there no mark on the young fellow, sir, by which you can identify him?"

"Why did I not think of that?" exclaimed the old gentleman, trembling in his excitement. "On his left shoulder, a red blotch the shape of a pear."

"You hear?" from the mayor.

"Yes, I hear. You won't find any such mark on me."

Father and daughter looked at each other in amazement the most profound.

"There is only one way to settle it," assumed Dalton. "That is, to look and see. Yank that coat back from his shoulders, men! You can do it without freeing his hands."

It was done promptly.

With a knife, then, the mayor cut open the shirt on top of the shoulder, exposing the fair skin beneath.

The skin was without mark or blemish of any kind, and the father could only stare in amazement, for his identification of the young man as his son had been positive.

"I don't understand," he muttered, turning away from the prisoner. "So much like my boy, and yet the mark is not there; I don't understand."

He pressed his hand over his eyes, and his daughter supported him as he went from the room.

"You are a fool, youngster," said the mayor, then. "If you had said you wur the prodigal, yer life would 'a' been spared to ye."

"No use deceiving them," was the response.

"Do you know what now awaits you? Do you know that we are goin' to hang your pard?"

"If you hang him, hang me, too. If he is guilty, so am I; if one innocent, both innocent. He is Ned Rixby just as much as I am Fred Jones."

"But you can't both be Deadwood Dick, and he is the cuss we are after. Come on with him, boys!"

He led the way from the room, the others followed with the prisoner, and in a few minutes the young man was put into the jail with the other.

Dalton then went back to the Corn Crib, where he had an interview with Miss Cary, the result of which was the promise on his part to spare the life of the younger of the prisoners, conditionally.

The young woman still believed most positively that it was her brother, in spite of the missing mark—which she had never seen, and for his sake she gave an agreement to the condition demanded; with a further condition the mayor did not quite relish, but which he accepted.

CHAPTER XIV.

FORCING A DOUBT.

The word of Mat Baldwin, who had seen Deadwood Dick, was not to be doubted. Buck accepted it, at any rate, and when he left the hotel he called his minions around him and they headed for the jail for the purpose of lynching that prisoner.

When they reached the jail, however, they found a surprise.

Only one prisoner was there!

With an execration, the mayor leaped inside and looked around.

"Where is he?" he demanded, drawing a gun.

"Didn't you send for him?" asked the prisoner.

"Send fer nothin'! Did some one let him out?"

"That is what happened; don't blame me for it."

"When was this?"

"A little while ago."

Strange to say, no guardsmen had been left, this time, but the mayor himself had examined the jail and found it secure.

How the Dutchman had made his escape, they had given up as a problem too deep for them to solve, and, in the rapid march of events, that had faded quickly in mind.

There was a running fire of questions and answers, out of which the mayor got but little satisfaction, and in a rage he ordered the prisoner dragged forth.

So it was, that when Hud Miller and his men rode into the camp, they found things as described.

The whole population was congregated; there was a rope around the neck of the prisoner, and they were just preparing to draw him up to the top of a pole.

"Hillo!" cried Miller. "What is up hyer?"

"Looks like they wur goin' to swing some poor cuss," said Gillins.

"Wonder who et kin be?"

"Mebby Deadwood Dick."

"Blazes! Ef that is so, they have got the bulge on us, after all."

"That's what's the matter, Hud. Let's holler at 'em, and put a spoke in their wheel ef we kin."

Ned let out a yell as he spoke, and attention being turned to them, a stay of proceedings was called and the mob waited for them to come up.

Miller and his right-hand man exchanged some hurried suggestions, and by the time they rode up they had agreed upon a plan of action, with their men posted respecting it.

"Jist in time," greeted Mayor Dalton. "We have got ther bulge on ye now, Hud Miller."

"What d'ye mean?" cried Miller, in pretended anger. "What aire ye goin' to do to that 'ar man?"

"What do I mean? I mean that we have got ther outlaw that's been posin' as Deadwood Dick."

"That man?"

"Yes."

"And you are goin' to hang him?"

"I reckon we aire. We thought we'd let you enjoy the sport, seein' you wur so near."

"Well, I guess not!" cried Miller. "That chap is one of my men, and if you pull him up to that pole there will be some funerals to foller, you kin 'pend on et!"

Miller and his men had their guns in hand.

Dalton, who had not been looking for this, had been taken off his guard.

"Your man?" he said.

"That's what I said; ain't et so, Buckshot?"

He addressed the prisoner.

"I tried to convince them of the fact that I was not Deadwood Dick, but they wouldn't believe me," said the prisoner. "I told 'em my name—Ned Rixby, but they wouldn't have et so."

While Dick did not thoroughly understand the game, he saw that it was for the moment favorable to him, and he was quick to take his cue.

look of supreme satisfaction came

over the face of the one-eyed mayor of Hard Luck.

"Of course et's Ned Rixby," shouted Miller. "Ain't that right, boys?"

"Sure et is," supported Gillins. "We all know Buckshot."

"No mistake thar," said the rest.

The mayor of Bald Eagle looked the chagrin he felt, and there was a further stay of proceedings.

"You mean to say this chap is a citizen of Hard Luck?" he demanded, in thunder tones.

"That's what he is," declared Miller, unabashed.

"Then why didn't he say so?"

"What was the use?" asked the prisoner. "You would not believe what I did tell you."

"Et is all a blamed lie!" suddenly broke in Baldwin.

"You had better have a care," hinted Miller.

"I care fer nothin'! I know Deadwood Dick by sight, and this man is him, hard and fast enough."

"You are mistaken," said Miller.

"Nary a mistake, by Judas!"

"You don't suppose all of us aire mistaken, do ye?" demanded Gillins.

"I don't suppose nothin' about et; I know ye lie! We have got Deadwood Dick hyer, and we aire goin' to lynch him, too!"

"Not ef we know et!" averred Miller. "We kem hyer in peace, Buck Dalton, but et will be war ef you try to hang one of our pards before our eyes."

"But, what proof have ye got?"

"Great Goshen! What more proof do ye want? Ain't here half a dozen of us? And don't the prisoner own us?"

"And don't I know him?" shouted Baldwin. "We ain't fools over hyer at Bald Eagle, ef your folks think we aire!"

"We know ye ain't," agreed Miller. "Ye would be, though, ef ye wur to hang a pard of ours after we had warned ye who he was. We want that 'ar prisoner, Buck Dalton."

"Ye won't git him!" shouted Baldwin. "Buck, don't ye see et is only a blind deal to get him out of our hands?"

"It is the word of half a dozen against one," reminded Miller.

"And mine to boot," added the prisoner.

"There is no way out of et, Matt," he Bald Eagle could do, under the circumstances, and the most forceful of the circumstances was the fact that Miller and his men had their guns out in hand and were ready to use them.

To delay meant a scrimmage in which, while the men of Bald Eagle would no doubt come off victors, yet a good deal of damage would be done, and Buck Dalton saw that he was one likely to go down in the melee.

He was not ready to die yet; he had schemes to live for.

There is no way out of et, Matt," he said to his bower. "Ef et was one of our men in their hands, and we went fer him, we'd expect to git him or know why; and et is the same here."

"I tell ye et is all a fake!" roared Baldwin. "We have got the real Deadwood Dick, and they are goin' to get him away from us. You will lose yer bet of a pound of dust, ef ye give him up, Buck; that I warn ye! By Judas! if ye do et I will git up and git out of yer camp!"

"I am a fair man, Matt," asserted Dalton, letting himself down easy with that, "and I must give the prisoner the

benefit of a doubt. There is no other way I see out of it."

"Good for you!" cried Miller. "Jist let him free and give him his hoss, and then I'll let out a bit of news that brought me hyer."

"He had no hoss," said Dalton, "but ye aire welcome to him. Free him, boys."

And accordingly it was done.

CHAPTER XV.

GIVEN A PAT POINTER.

As soon as freed, Deadwood Dick stepped forward and shook hands with Miller.

"You happened along in the nick of time, I tell you, Hud," he declared. "A little longer and I would have swung as high as the goose in the song."

"A miss is as good as a mile, Buck-shot," responded Miller. "So, ye aire hyer without yer hoss, eh? Wull, that bein' the case, ye will have ter walk back, I reckon."

"And glad of the chance to do it," assured Dick.

"Now fer the news we have fer ye, Dalton," spoke up the mayor of Hard Luck, while Dick shook hands with the rest of the boys, to carry out to the full the deception.

What the game was, Dick was not fully aware as yet, but he was playing his part well, according to his cue.

"Yes, what is et?" demanded Dalton.

"We want to tell ye that Hard Luck tops away over Bald Eagle, now."

"What? Then you have got another Deadwood Dick over thar, maybe. The woods must be full of 'em, by mighty!"

"No, et ain't a Deadwood Dick; he's most too leetle for that, yet, though he is built that way. Hard Luck has got ther finest baby boy ye ever seen in yer born days!"

"What of that?"

"What of et! Why, ther first kid born in Skeleton Gorge deestrick, that's what!"

"Nothin' to boast of," sneered Dalton. "Ef you have come all the way hyer to tell us that, you are a greater fool than I ever took ye fer."

"Wull, that's what I have. Your makin' light of et is only natural; I would make light of et myself, ef you brought sech news to Hard Luck; but, all the same, I would feel all cut up inside, same as you feel; ha! ha! ha!"

"Cuss ye, et's nothin'! I s'pose Jim Plunket's old woman—"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Miller. "That shows ye're away off. Et is the gal that rode into town while you was thar, the one you roped—"

"The deuce you say!"

"Ha! ha! ha! I thought you would own beat. What do ye think of ther man what tied her to that hoss?"

Deadwood Dick was paying close attention to all this.

Matt Baldwin, meantime, was making his way out of the crowd, without drawing attention to himself, and was leading some men with him.

"The infernal scoundrel!" cried Dalton. "I am no saint, but by the great that is a deed wuss'n I could do! He ought to be caught and burned at the stake!"

"Et would serve him right, I believe."

"What does the gal say?"

"Says nothin'. She is as true as gold, and won't give him away."

"Oh, sir! what is her name?"

It was a woman's voice.

Turning, they there saw Helen Cary, who had been listening.

"We don't know her name, miss," answered the mayor, "cept that her first name is Sarah—"

"My God! Perhaps it is my sister! Where is this place you speak of? I must go there—I must go there at once!"

"You don't want to go to that hole," spoke up Buck Dalton, who saw the whole game slipping through his fingers. "It is no fit place for a lady like you, and we—"

"But a lady is there—it may be my sister!"

"We are no angels here, miss, but that gang over thar are devils. You yourself see a few specimens of them here."

The girl gave one glance at Miller, and shivered.

"He is a liar, miss," Miller cried. "We ain't purty on the outside, mebbey, but we have got all meat hearts jist ther same, and that lady that is thar is receivin' the best of care."

"And you will take me to her?"

"You can bet your life he won't!" grated Dalton. "You are under the protection of this camp at present, miss, and we won't allow you to run into such a danger as that. We'll send a delegation over with ye to-morrow, and you can then see if your suspicions are right."

"But sir—"

"No but about et; my word is law here. Besides, it is all for your own good."

"But, my sister—"

"Maybe it is not your sister at all? If it is, you have heard them say that she is in good hands. I happen to know the man whose cabin she is in; he is the only white man of the lot."

"Yet, if it should be—"

"Then you'll know it to-morrow. This is no place for you, miss; go back to the hotel and trust it all to me."

With tears in her eyes, the girl obeyed.

"Wull, we must be off," spoke up Mayor Miller. "Fall in amongst us, Buck-shot, and we'll see that ye git safely out of the hands of these hyer Bald Eagle buzzards."

Had it not been for the fact that there existed a secret affinity in their rascality between the two mayors, which even their open rivalry could not afford to override, they might have come to a serious situation before they parted company. Even as it was, almost the last straw had been laid upon Buck Dalton's shoulders.

"And you'll see how you'll fare with the Hard Luck hyenas," he retorted. "We'll meet again, Hud Miller, and we'll see which will come out on top before this game ends."

"All right, Buck; you will find us at home any time you want to call."

So they rode out of the camp, but keeping their eyes well about them and their guns in hand ready for business.

"You are a mighty sharp cuss, Buck-shot, and you caught on like a game chicken, you did, when I guv ye that chance; but, all the same, you are only out of the fryin' pan into the fire. Et is mighty plain that you must be Deadwood Dick, and thar is a rope awaitin' you at Hard Luck."

"That is rather hard luck, indeed," said Dick, with a grim humor.

"What I was goin' to say, don't you try on no game, or you'll find a bullet searchin' yer vitals instanter."

"Oh, I am not altogether a fool. But, I see you are no more willing than the others to accept the truth that my name is Ned Rixby and not Deadwood Dick."

"Bah! We take Mat Baldwin's word fer et."

"Well, that aside; if you are half the men at all you will go to Bald Eagle and rescue that lady out of their hands to-night."

"Et would be the same for her—frying pan to fire."

"Then you are even more of brutes than I took you to be. That fellow there has an evil eye upon her, and if you do not rescue her out of his hands you are dogs," vehemently spoken.

"Et would be a good thing to do," declared Ned Gillins.

"I'll think of et," conceded Miller. "We can't crowd Dalton too hard, or he will kick over the traces."

"What matter if he does, so long as you come out on top? If I were Deadwood Dick, as you seem to think, and were here on business, I would offer to lead you to just such a victory as that."

"What fer stranger?"

"I would probably be here on business to make it hot for both gangs, and seeing that I could not handle both, I would choose the least of the two evils and aid that side in defeating the other, and you could then control the whole country without a rival."

"Ef you wur Deadwood Dick, ye say."

"Yes."

"Wull, ye needn't say no more; that is proof enough fer me that ye sure-enough are him. Men, bind and gag ther cuss!"

"Just a word of warning, mayor, before you do that," said Dick, as the men seized him.

"Well, spit et out quick, then!"

"Maybe you noticed and maybe you didn't, but that fellow Baldwin left Bald Eagle before we did, with a picked crew at his heels. I think you can expect an ambush somewhere in Skeleton Gorge."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE CLIFF.

Hud Miller called a halt instantly.

They had just entered the gorge, and were out of sight from the camp.

Here was a bit of information that caused him an uneasy sensation down his spine, and no wonder.

"You mean that?" he demanded.

"Of course I mean it," Dick assured.

"Maybe it is some trick of yours? Maybe you have an axe to grind?"

"It is no trick, but I have an interest in it, a personal interest. I want to reach your camp with a whole skin if I can."

"And don't want to fall in the hands of Buck Dalton again, eh?"

"That is about the size of it."

"Well, I am glad you told us. There is enough time to take another trail home, and one that they won't think of, seein' that they have no reason to suppose that we are on to their game."

"Then that is the route you want to take," avowed Dick.

They wheeled short about, retraced their steps a little way, and entered a narrow defile between two high walls of rock.

The trend was sharply upward, for a distance, but after awhile it became of less abrupt pitch, and they were able to make their way without great exertion.

It was by this time growing dusk.

"We have got a nasty bit of trail to pass, this way," remarked Hud Miller. "Push on, boys."

"You are right about that," assented Ned Gillins. "Well, if night overtakes us we can stop at the half-way and put up thar till daylight."

"Yes, but we must push on if possible," said the mayor.

Dick, who had been both gagged and bound, after giving the information concerning Mat Baldwin, was obliged to walk between the horses of two of the men, where he could be easily watched, though there was little fear that he would make any attempt to escape.

The shadows increased as they went on, and by the time they came to the "nasty" bit of the trail it was growing dark.

This part was along a narrow cliff, or shelf.

On one hand was a descent into impenetrable blackness, and on the other a wall of rock rose straight upward for hundreds of feet.

On the one hand, numerous cracks and curves had to be constantly watched and avoided, and had it not been that there were corresponding niches and recesses in the wall on the other hand, the trail would have been well-nigh impassable.

They had made about half the distance along this treacherous way when a bright light ahead drew their attention.

"What's that?" asked Ned Gillins.

"It is at the half-way cabin, ain't it?" from Miller.

"Et looks to be."

"Then we'll soon know. Mebby et is Mat Baldwin and his crew, stoppin' this trail, too."

"We had better be ready fer him, then, ef that's the case. Come on, and not a word out of any of ye, boys. We'll show him a thing or two, mebby."

A little distance further, and they came to a wider part of the trail, and here they made a discovery.

There stood a cabin close in against the rock wall, on the widest part of the shelf. The cabin was now on fire, smoke and flames pouring out from under the edge of the roof.

On the edge of the cliff stood a young man, a pistol in his grasp.

In the roar and crackle of the burning, he did not hear the party approach, and they heard him shout:

"If you are there, come out, you coward, and face me!"

The next moment he saw the party coming, and he gave all his attention to them.

"Friends or foes?" he demanded, bringing his pistol up to the level. "If you are honest men, I ask you to aid me in capturing the vilest wretch that ever went unchanged!"

"Who is et?" demanded Hud Miller.

"That need not matter; believe what I tell—Ha! You have got him! I thought he was here, in this cabin! He must have run past instead of entering, as I thought. Now, curse you, it is your life or mine!"

He leaped forward and laid a hand on the shoulder of Deadwood Dick, at the same time bringing his pistol to bear on the detective's head.

Dick, gagged, could say nothing, and his sombrero shaded his face.

In the same instant, almost, the crack of a weapon was heard, coming from the burning cabin; the young man threw his right arm and reeled backward with a groan.

His left hand still gripped Dick's shoulder, and as the edge of the cliff was within a few inches, over went the youth, dragging Deadwood Dick with him, beyond one could put forth a hand to

em, and down into the stygian abyss they tumbled!

Woe and Ned Gillins, with their long aed sinners though they were, shakings of horror.

Then, remembering whence the shot had come, they got quickly out of range.

"That does fer them!" assumed Gillins.

"You bet!" agreed Miller.

"Wonder who et was fired the shot?"

"Some cuss in ther cabin. We'll soon know, now."

"Yas, fer he can't long stand that fire, I should reckon—ha! thar he is!"

Sure enough! A man leaped from the burning cabin, at that moment—a man wild-eyed, and face filled with alarm, who looked not unlike the prisoner who had been taken out of their hands in so horrible a manner.

He appeared to be about the same age, was similarly clad, and, in the half darkness, might easily have been mistaken for the same man.

"That proves how ther lad made his mistake," opined Miller. "We must have him."

"By heavens! d'ye know what I think?"

"No; what?"

"Mebby this is ther real Deadwood Dick."

"By glory! I never oncet thought of that! We must have him, sure!"

"Oh! he is our mutton, hard and fast enough. See, he is like a rat in a trap, and he knows it!"

This was true.

In front was the blazing cabin, now becoming like a furnace, and whose heat he would not be able to endure many seconds where he stood.

Behind was the edge of the cliff, with the black depths below, and on either side were men with guns in hand, Miller and Gillins on one hand and their companions on the other.

"Might as well throw up yer hands!" called out the mayor of Hard Luck.

"Or take yer choice how ye want to die," added Gillins. "You have got a hull deck of ways afore ye."

The man looked a picture of desperation.

His eyes were wild and dilated, his hair was tumbled, and his face was as the face of a madman.

Miller gave a signal to his men, while the man was looking toward him and Ned Gillins. They came upon him with a rush, and he was quickly made their prisoner.

He struggled desperately, uttering cries that were almost screams, and muttering half incoherent sayings that they could neither catch nor understand. It looked as if they had gotten hold of a madman in fact. But, was it sham or was it real?

They soon had him bound and gagged, the same as they had had Deadwood Dick only a little while before.

"What d'ye think?" demanded Miller, of his right hand man.

"Mebby he is the cuss," was the answer. "But, let's git on to Hard Luck, the first thing, and then we'll have time to study him a bit and find out as to that."

So they pressed on their way and the exciting incidents through which they had passed having caused them to forget, for the time being, Mat Baldwin and his men, they were suddenly surprised by an ambush into which they walked with eyes wide open.

CHAPTER XVII.

SURPRISING NEWS GIVEN.

"Hands up! every mother's son of ye!"

And there they were, Mat and his backers, their guns leveled and every man of the other party covered.

Mayor Miller and his men uttered expletives in a shower, but that did not help the situation a particle; they were caught, and their hands went up without needless delay.

"That's right," approved Mat, with a grim grin. "And now we'll take back that prisoner, ef you please. You have got to git up early in the morning when you git ahead of Bald Eagle!"

Ned Gillins was about to say something, but Mayor Miller gave him a nudge to hold his tongue.

"We ain't got a word to say, Mat." Miller himself spoke up. "You have got the best hand, and so the trick is yours. Take him and make the most of him; he wasn't goin' to escape us anyhow, you see."

"No, I see he wasn't. A fine way to treat one of yer own men, truss him up like a turkey fer roastin'—Ha! ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Miller, too. "Et was a trick that worked, anyhow."

"Yes, somethin' like this one; ha! ha! ha!"

And then Miller laughed again, this time Gillins and the others joining in.

They felt that the best of the joke was still with them. It was now too dark for the others to see that the prisoner was not the one they had taken from Bald Eagle.

"What are ye laffin' at?" Mat demanded.

"To see how blamed nice we fell into your trap," answered Miller.

"Et was your own foolishness done et. Ef ye hadn't fired that old cabin we wouldn't s'pected ye was on this hyer trail."

At that Hud Miller and his men went off into another fit, and by this time the others were beginning to suspect that something was not right, yet they were unable to see what it could be.

"Durn et, what aire ye a-he-hawin' about, anyhow?" Mat demanded.

"Jist see what an all-around April fool et was," declared Hud. "We thought when we fired ther cabin that et would draw ye in from t'other end of the trail, not thinkin' that ye wur at this end. Wull, et is done, and the trick is yours."

"Yes, you kin gamble et is. And next time you come to Bald Eagle to do us, be sure that you know what ye aire about."

"You bet we wull."

"Git on your way, now, and we'll go on ours to Bald Eagle."

So they moved on their way, Hud and his gang, feeling very blue yet at the same time much amused.

And when they had gone, Mat Baldwin and those with him set forward with their prisoner, with never a thought that they had not the right man, or that a change had been made.

"Won't there be a time, though, when they find out their mistake?" Hud Miller laughed.

"They won't find et out till et's too late," assumed Gillins.

"But what ef et ain't no mistake?" spoke up one of their men.

"What do you mean?"

"Mebby it is, the real Deadwood Dick."

"That is a point to be found out," said Gillins. "I et ain't, then who was et?"

"Mebby some poor cuss who is innocent as kin be," suggested Miller. "But even so, I don't see how we aire goin' to help him a bit, do you?"

"No, hang me ef I do. Before we kin git to Hard Luck and git out the boys,

the chap will be swingin' cold to that pole over thar at Bald Eagle, and et will be too late."

"That's et."

"And thar is no use lookin' fer the two chaps that went over the ledge, fer we would only find mincemeat at the bottom."

"Not only so, but we couldn't git down thar without daylight to aid us, and I doubt muchly whether we could do et then or not: No, we ain't in et; all we have got is the baby."

So they talked, as they wended their way homeward.

Meanwhile Mat Baldwin and his chosen followers were making their way with their prisoner to Bald Eagle.

In due time they reached their destination, entering the camp singing at the top of their voices, and the whole population turned out to meet them.

"What ther mischief?" demanded Dalton.

"Et was a fine trick, but we played a finer," asserted Mat.

"You have got ther prisoner back?"

"You bet! They had him bound and gagged, and wur marchin' him off to Hard Luck fer a hangin', when we held 'em up and took him away from 'em. I told ye thar was no mistake."

"And that's proof of et, all the proof we need ask fer," cried Dalton.

"You bet! Get lights and a rope, boys."

Lights were quickly brought, and a rope, and the prisoner was hurried to the pole whereon Deadwood Dick had come so near to meeting his fate.

There the rope was put around the neck of the man, who, by this time, had become sullen, or who acted more as if a stupor had come over him so that he did not fully realize the situation.

"Now, what have ye got to say yer yerself?" demanded the bower, who was acting as superintendent of ceremonies and had removed the gag. "Ye have got jist one minute in which to say yer say!"

"I was mad—mad!" the wretched man cried. "The devil that is in me was uppermost! Ha! Ha! Ha! Deadwood Dick, you are saved the trouble! Mad! Mad! I am a devil! Hang me; it is my just doom!"

The men around looked from one to another inquiringly.

"Bet yer life et is yer just doom," said the bower. "You are saved the trouble of doin' anything hyer, in your line, you bet you aire, Deadwood Dick. Ha! Ha! Playin' crazy to git off, mebbey."

A slight wind was blowing, the torches flared and there was more shadow than light upon the scene, and the mistake was not discovered.

They believed they had the prisoner that had been taken from them by the men from Hard Luck.

"This is the way we deal with outlaws," declared Dalton.

"And let it be a warnin' to all sech," added his bower.

The prisoner muttered to himself, in an unintelligible fashion, and in a few seconds the signal was given.

The men who had hold of the rope carried their victim to the top of the pole with a run, amidst a rousing cheer, and the poor wretch swung and swayed in the night wind.

The rope was made fast, and leaving half a score of men on guard, the rest repaired to the Corn Crib to celebrate their victory.

Ten minutes later and the guard, too deserted their post.

The man was dead.

Bald Eagle let itself loose in the celebration of its double victory, the fact that it had hanged the "notorious outlaw masquerading as Deadwood Dick," as they put it for a blind, and the other fact that they had distanced the rival camp.

"How about that pound of dust, Buck?" reminded Baldwin.

"We'll attend to collecting that a little later on," answered the mayor.

"We have got the big bulge on Hard Luck this deal, sure enough. All they have got to show is that baby they brag about."

"And mebbey that will come our way, too, before the game ends," opined the mayor. "But, Mat," in a lower voice, "we have got other business on hand and will have to be actin'."

"Plenty of time, yet, mayor."

"Yes, but we want sober men. I depend on you."

"All right. But don't you see you have put a spoke in your own wheel?"

"How is that?"

"You have hanged the outlaw you wanted to play—"

"It was you did that, Mat. But, no matter; there are more outlaws than one. The thing must be worked."

"Oh, et will be worked all right, don't you have a doubt of that. I will see ye through with et. But what's that ther landlord is sayin'?"

"I was sayin'," repeated the proprietor of the "shebang," "that the gal and her dad are missin'; they have got up and took French leave; but they left money in the room to settle their bill, so I ain't kickin' any."

The mayor of the camp was on his feet instantly with an oath.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RIGHT OVER WRONG.

"Gone!" Dalton cried.

"Clean as a whistle," the landlord assured.

"Where, when, how? Where have they gone to? By heavens! I'll stop 'em!"

"Wull, now, ye aire askin' me too much. Mebbey my old woman knows somethin' about et, or the cook, but hang me ef I do."

Dalton made a break for the kitchen, where he encountered the cook, and in much fear and trembling she told what she knew—that the girl had passed out that way, with her father, some time before.

Further search revealed that their horses were gone, and a careful scrutiny of the ground by light of torches gave the further information that they had made a wide circuit of the camp and finally rode into Skeleton Gorge, and must be by that time at Hard Luck.

This was "hard luck" for Bald Eagle.

"Et was that baby story done et," Dalton stormed. "You know what she spoke about a sister."

"Ten to one that was it," agreed his bower. "What aire ye goin' to do about et?"

"I'll show them what I'm going to do about et, by Judas! I told 'em before that it was war to the knife, and now et is, fer a fact! I'll go over there with a hundred men at daylight!"

"And clean out the coop, eh?"

"You bet!"

Meantime, the "coop" had been "cleaned."

Hud Muller and his men, on their arrival home, found things in a very different shape from what they had been on their departure.

They entered the Hard Luck saloon, as customary, and once within, men appeared at the doors with guns in hand and called on them to surrender.

What did it mean?

At one door was the face of Deadwood Dick's Dutch Pard, and at the other was Wilson Horn, each with a brace of guns to the fore.

And behind these were others, so that it looked as if at least a score of weapons were leveled at Miller and his men. They put up their hands as ordered, and promptly.

"Dot vas id," cried Hans. "You vas our prisoners, vielleicht!"

"And the first man who bolts will think my mule has kicked him in a vital spot, I promise," declared Mr. Horn. "Men, enter and disarm them, to a man!"

Some were already in, others entered, and in a few seconds the Mayor of Hard Luck and his ringleaders were prisoners in fact.

They had been too surprised to speak.

"What does this mean?" Miller now found his voice and thundered. "I demand to be set at liberty!"

"By chimminy coosecrease!" exclaimed the Dutchman, in response, "I pet me you find oudt vhat id means, maype! Id means dot Teadwood Tick vas around und dot you vas got id in der neck. See?"

"And that you will also get it in the vitals, if you make any attempt at resistance," added Mr. Horn. "Our next point of attack will be Bald Eagle."

The truth dawned upon them finally, that Hard Luck was in the hands of a marshal's posse, and that the reign of bad men was over.

Horn and Hans were pards of Deadwood Dick, of course.

Their prisoners taken care of, a meeting of the citizens was called, and when asked how many were in favor of law and order their hands went up to a man.

The two aides selected a number of men from among them, to make up for the number they had to leave there at Hard Luck to guard the prisoners and preserve order.

With these they were about to set out for Bald Eagle when Henry Cary and his daughter came into the camp. Helen asked immediately for the young stranger woman, and she and her father were handed over to Jim Plunket.

Deadwood Dick's pards, then, with their men, set out for Bald Eagle with all haste, some bearing lanterns and torches that they might be delayed as little as possible.

The party had gone perhaps two-thirds of the distance when those in advance heard a groan, and halted.

"Who is that?" called out Horn.

"Ha! is it you?" came the response in the voice of Deadwood Dick. He had recognized the voice of his pard instantly. "Bring here your lights and aid me with this wounded lad."

Those who had lights were soon around them, and Russell Cary was found on the ground unconscious. Some liquor was poured into his mouth, and while they were striving to bring him to, Dick told what had happened and how they had come to be there.

Their fall over the cliff had been broken by a mass of tangled vine, which they had dropped, and Dick had been ever since trying to work his way out, carrying the young man. Young Cary's wound was only a slight one, and it was

well as possible, and ere long he opened his eyes and looked around him.

"Where am I?" he asked. "Ah! Now I remember. It was he—it was my mortal foe, and I must find him again."

He started up, and with difficulty gained and remained on his feet.

"You mean it was Abner Danson?" asked Dick.

The young man turned upon him and gave him a keen, searching look, and responded:

"Oh! it is you, Rixby? Yes, I mean Abner Danson. What became of him? What happened to me? Ah! was I shot? I remember, now, and a sensation as of falling."

It was made clear to him, and as soon as he had in a measure regained his strength they pressed on to Bald Eagle.

When they reached there they entered the camp silently. There was no life, save in and around the Corn Crib, and believing that they would find their prey there, they advanced to surround it.

On the way, they came to the pole on which hung the lifeless body, and at the sight of it they stopped. But, there was no time then to examine it, as they could not do without light. They merely cut it down and laid it on the ground to await their convenience.

That done, they pressed silently on and surrounded the Corn Crib, and entered and "held up" the whole "congregation." There was some resistance, but a few shots fired and a few men laid out speedily brought the rest to time, and Buck Dalton and his bower, and some others of the leaders, were taken prisoners and made secure.

It was a surprise complete, and they realized that a master hand was in control. With lights, then, Dick and his pards returned to the place where the dead man lay on the ground, and at sight of his face young Cary cried:

"It is Abner Danson! A just fate has overtaken him!"

Leaving others of the posse in charge of Bald Eagle, Dick and the rest, with their prisoners, returned to Hard Luck.

By the time they reached there the hour was late, and nothing more could be done till morning. The prisoners were guarded well during the night, and at daylight, after a hasty breakfast, they were sent out under strong guard to the capital.

Deadwood Dick and his pards had come out on top, and had scored a victory that completely broke up two of the worst gangs the Territory had ever known. It had been indeed a hot hustle for Dick himself, but, as he said, they "got there just the same."

Russell Cary, in search of Abner Danson, had at last found his sister, and she tried to keep him from reaching her husband. In striving to do that and at the same time shield her brother from Danson she aroused the latent insane jealousy of the latter and he was impelled, in his frenzy, to commit the heinous act we have made known. The murder had been committed by Danson, who purposely put the crime upon Russell, then afterward aided him to escape.

The meeting of the sisters on the previous night had been affecting, as well as that between the aged father and the disobedient daughter, and the further reunion with Russell was none the less so.

Russell had disowned his father and sister before for good reasons, as he thought. In the first place, if hanged, he did not want to think it had been he. Next, he was determined to persevere

in running down Danson, and believed they would try to turn him aside from his purpose. Further, he wanted to share the dangers of his new friend, Rixby. As to the mark on his shoulder, he had such a mark, but his father had forgotten which shoulder it was on.

The escapes from the jail at Bald Eagle were easy to account for, when explained. The jail being small, and of logs, a strong man could lift a corner of it sufficiently to admit the passage of his body, and thus Hans Donnerwelt had gotten out on both occasions. On his way to Hard Luck he met Dick in the gorge, where they had a consultation, and he mentioned his escape to him. Hence, Dick was prepared to effect young Cary's escape in the same manner, later on; the German, in the meantime, going on to Hard Luck and consulting with Horn, where they proceeded to carry out further plans according to Dick's directions, as we have seen.

As for Dick, he had a hot hustle in Skeleton Gorge, and only for the help of his Dutch Pard and Wilson Horn, he might never have reached the end of it.

The Cary family, reunited, returned to their former home. Jim Plunket was made mayor of Hard Luck, and another worthy fellow was given the same office at Bald Eagle. All the "bad men" of both rival camps got their just desserts. The skeleton in Skeleton Gorge was taken down from its place between the big boulders and buried, and from that time the evil name of that section began to pass away.

As for Deadwood Dick, hero of a hundred campaigns—Well, more anon.

THE END.

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